Guidance for High School Seniors

The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education is aware of this unprecedented period of time experienced our high school seniors, families, and public and independent high schools, charter schools, and home school associations. Our highest priority is to ensure that every student attending SC public and independent colleges and universities has the opportunity to succeed. The Commission is focused on steps that can be taken to assist our students in every possible way to earn state scholarships and grants. The agency will continue to look for ways that not only recognizes the academic accomplishments of deserving students but also helps to address the financial burdens that are confronting students and families this year. In addition to the Commission, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) has issued guidelines for public high schools with regards to grading and the end of the academic year. The scholarships will be awarded based on the students' final high school GPA and class ranking at the end of the school year, as directed by the SCDE. A link to the guidelines on grade reporting, issued by SCDE for 2019-20 on March 30, 2020, can be found here: https://ed.sc.gov/newsroom/school-district-memoranda-archive/covid-19-grade-reporting-guidance/covid-19-grade-reporting-guidance-memo/.

Updated Information and Recent Questions about State Scholarships and Grants:

Palmetto Fellows Scholarship:

Initial Eligibility Requirements

The eligibility requirements will not change for 2019-2020. Students are eligible to apply if they meet one of the following sets of academic requirements:

> 1. Score at least 1200 on the SAT (27 on the ACT), earn a minimum 3.50 cumulative GPA on the SC Uniform Grading Policy (SC UGP) at the end of junior year, and rank in the top six percent of the class at the end of either the sophomore or the junior year;
> OR
> 2. Score at least 1400 on the SAT (32 on the ACT), earn a minimum 4.00 cumulative GPA on the SC UGP at the end of the junior year or senior year.

Public and independent high schools, charter schools and home school association school counselors will be reaching out to Seniors to determine if they meet the eligibility requirements for the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship. The Late award period opened May 15th and closes June 30, 2020 at 5:00pm.

Due to ACT's April and May test cancellations and SAT's May and June test cancellations, my child has been unable to improve their test score to meet the eligibility requirements for the Palmetto Fellows. Will CHE make an allowance for these disruptions?

The actual SAT and/or ACT test score eligibility requirements for state scholarships are statutorily mandated. This means the requirements cannot be adjusted or removed without General Assembly approval. Both the ACT and the College Board offered test administrations in October, November, December, February, and March. While CHE staff does understand that both the College Board and ACT have cancelled their May test administrations and while the College Board also cancelled their June SAT administration, ACT is still planning to offer both a June and a July test administration, at this point. In response to ACT's decision to offer a July examination, **CHE has enacted emergency regulations to allow for students to continue standardized testing through July of 2020. Students will now have the opportunity to obtain a qualifying score by the July test administration of the ACT during 2020**. Please be advised that the last day to register for the June ACT test date is May 22, 2020. And the last day to register for the July ACT test examination is June 26, 2020.

LIFE Scholarship: Students who are attempting a qualifying score through the July ACT test administration need to have their test scores sent to their college or university. The financial aid office at their institution will determine their eligibility for the LIFE Scholarship and award accordingly.

Palmetto Fellows Scholarship: Students who are planning to take the ACT test in June or July of 2020 will need to notify their School Counselor. The student's Palmetto Fellows Scholarship application must be submitted as Pending by the Late Award Period deadline of June 30, 2020. As a reminder, the deadline for transcript grade and rank calculation is June 15, 2020. Students will need to have their test scores sent directly to CHE. Our ACT registration code is 6326. Applications will be processed once test scores are received.

With the COVID-19 disruptions to the regular learning schedule, my child may not perform as well in an online learning environment. If this affects their GPA and/or rank, they may not meet the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship eligibility requirements. Will CHE reduce the eligibility requirements for Palmetto Fellows?

The Palmetto Fellows Scholarship eligibility requirements are statutorily mandated. S.C. Commission on Higher Education administers each scholarship program according to the legislation so that funding is distributed fairly and equitably to all eligible South Carolina students. Students have opportunities to meet the eligibility requirements to apply for the Palmetto Fellow Scholarship or they may be eligible to be considered for the other SC state scholarships, such as the LIFE scholarship or the SC HOPE.

I received a Palmetto Fellows confirmation email previously and it stated I would receive another email Mid-March. I haven't received the Palmetto Fellows email yet with the Designation Form. When can I expect an email?

Students should be monitoring their Spam/Junk email folders. Palmetto Fellows notification emails are sent in batches and therefore can get pushed into Spam folders. Student notifications emails are being sent as we are processing paper application packets.

My School Counselor has been collecting documents all year to submit Palmetto Fellows applications before the deadline. Now that school is closed indefinitely, will there be a postponement to the deadline and alternative submission methods? Due to F.E.R.P.A. privacy regulations, Palmetto Fellows application packets need to be mailed to the S.C. Commission on Higher Education. However, high school and college transcripts (for dual enrollment courses) can be electronically submitted. The Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Late Award Period opens May 15th and closes June 30, 2020. This means that although many Seniors will graduate in May, the high school counselors have until June 30th to submit the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Application for the Late Award Period. For those students taking the June ACT test, their applications will be pending until the scores are sent from ACT and received by the Commission on the student's behalf. If there are any concerns about Palmetto Fellows Application submissions over the summer, students or counselors can contact Ms. Katie Harris at kharris@che.sc.gov or Ms. Leslie Williams at lwilliams@che.sc.gov.

LIFE and SC HOPE Scholarships:

Initial Eligibility Requirements:

For 2019-2020, upon high school graduation, SC resident students will be required to have two (2) of the following initial eligibility criteria:
S.C. HOPE Scholarship (4-year institutions only)

a) Earn at least a 3.0 final high school GPA based on the SC Uniform Grading Policy

LIFE Scholarship (2-year institution)

a) Earn at least a 3.0 final high school GPA based on the SC Uniform Grading Policy

LIFE Scholarship (4-year institution)

a) Earn at least a 3.0 final high school GPA based on the SC Uniform Grading Policy

b) Score a minimum of 1100 on the SAT or 24 on the ACT; or

c) Rank in the top 30% of the graduating high school class (if applicable).

On April 15, 2020 the College Board announced that the June SAT test administration has been cancelled and future opportunities to take the test will begin August 29, 2020, after the fall semester begins with priority given to first time test takers https://pages.collegeboard.org/sat-covid-19-updates. ACT announced on April 16, 2020 that it will offer a flexible schedule for summer 2020 test dates http://leadershipblog.act.org/2020/04/act-to-offer-students-additional-summer.html. Students who wish to take the ACT have the option of the June test administration. Students wanting to participate in the June ACT, need to register prior to May 22, 2020.

The South Carolina Department of Education has issued guidelines for public high schools with regards to grading and the end of the academic year. The scholarships will be awarded based on the students' final high school GPA and class ranking at the end of the school year, as directed by the SC DOE. A link to the guidelines on grade reporting, issued by the SC DOE for 2019-20 on

March 30, 2020, can be found here: https://ed.sc.gov/newsroom/school-district-memoranda-archive/covid-19-grade-reporting-guidance/covid-19-grade-reporting-guidance-memo/.

SC Need-based Grant:

Initial Eligibility Requirements:

The initial eligibility requirements will not change for 2019-20. Upon high school graduation, SC resident students will be required to meet the following:

a) Be a needy student as defined by Title IV Federal Student Aid Programs for determining eligibility for federal student financial aid. The student must complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form;

b) Be a U.S. citizen or a legal permanent resident who meets the definition of an eligible non-citizen under State residency statutes;

c) Be a legal resident of South Carolina as defined in applicable State statutes governing the determination of residency for tuition and fee purposes;

d) Be enrolled at the time of the grant disbursement in a minimum of twelve credit hours if full-time or six credit hours if part-time for the term at an eligible public institution;

e) Have not been convicted of any felonies or been convicted of any second or subsequent alcohol or drug-related misdemeanor offenses within the past academic year by submitting a signed affidavit to the financial aid office at the institution at which the student is enrolled;

f) Does not owe a refund or repayment on a State Grant, Pell Grant, or a Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant and not be in default on a loan under the Federal Perkins Loan or Federal Stafford Loan program; and

g) Complete any other documentation required by the financial aid office at the institution at which the student is enrolled.

S.C. Lottery Tuition Assistance Grant (2-year institution)

Initial Eligibility Requirements:

a) Be a SC resident attending an eligible 2-year institution in South Carolina;

b) Enroll as a degree seeking student in at least six credit hours of instruction at an eligible institution;

c) Complete a FAFSA or FAFSA waiver.

Current Topics and Frequently Asked Questions for High School Seniors

LIFE and SC HOPE Scholarships
Topic: Final high school GPA's needed for initial eligibility

Guidance: No changes have been made to the initial eligibility criteria for the SC HOPE or LIFE Scholarships. A student must earn at least a 3.0 final high school GPA for both awards. The South Carolina Department of Education has issued guidelines for public high schools with regards to grading and the end of the academic year. The scholarships will be awarded based on the students' final high school GPA and class ranking at the end of the school year, as directed by the SC DOE. A link to the guidelines on grade reporting, issued by the SC DOE for 2019-20 on March 30, 2020, can be found here: https://ed.sc.gov/newsroom/school-district-memoranda-archive/covid-19-grade-reporting-guidance/covid-19-grade-reporting-guidance-memo/. Though the memo addresses public schools, CHE would ask that all independent schools, charter schools, home schools and home school associations adhere to the same guidelines with regards to the required dates for reporting. This ensures that all students are held to the same standard.

Topic: Remaining SAT and ACT Testing Dates for 2020

Guidance: Both the ACT and SAT were able to offer the tests in August, September, October, November, December, February and March. While CHE staff does understand that both SAT and ACT have cancelled their April and May tests, and SAT has now cancelled their June test administration, ACT has announced **they are waiving late registration fees for the June and July test administrations and the CHE will accept June and July ACT test scores.** Students will still have the opportunity to obtain a qualifying score by taking the June or July ACT test. We are aware that several issues have caused concern for students including the recent cancellation of the May and June SAT test administrations and limited opportunities to take the SAT to increase present scores. The ACT summer test administrations ensures that all students are given an opportunity to achieve a needed test score over the summer prior to fall enrollment.

Topic: Super scoring the SAT and ACT Testing Dates for 2020

Guidance: For 2019-2020, the qualifying SAT score for the LIFE (1100) and Palmetto Fellows Scholarships (1200 or 1400) can be achieved by super scoring, or combining the highest evidenced-based reading and evidenced-based math scores from any test administration. With regards to the ACT, this testing company will begin offering the first opportunity to super score this coming <u>fall</u>. CHE staff was able to reach out to ACT staff to confirm the start date of the ACT super scoring option. According to ACT, super scoring will be available <u>beginning in September 2020</u>. According to ACT, super scoring will not be available prior to September 2020 based on the testing company's development schedule and current regulations.

Topic: Is there an application for the LIFE or SC HOPE Scholarships?

Guidance: There is no application for the LIFE or SC HOPE Scholarships. If the college or university the student is attending determines that the criteria for the award have been met (GPA, class ranking, ACT/SAT, residency, etc.), they will automatically award the student the scholarship. However, it is never a bad idea to reach out to the financial aid office at the college to inquire on award timing, amount and procedures.

SC Need-based Grants
Topic: How can I get a SC Need-based Grant or a SC Tuition Grant?

Guidance: SC resident students should be sure they have completed the Federal Application for Free Student Aid (FAFSA). Students will then need to contact the financial aid office of the institution they are attending to have eligibility determined. There is no additional application to apply for a SC Need-based Grant if SC resident students are attending a SC public institution.

The South Carolina Tuition Grant is a need-based grant administered by the SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission. The grant may be available to South Carolina residents who choose to attend an eligible in-state independent institution.

The application for the SC Tuition Grant is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) – no additional or separate application is required. However, the FAFSA must be completed prior to June 30, 2020, in order to be considered for the grant. The 2020-2021 FAFSA uses financial information from the 2018 tax year. To be considered for the SC Tuition Grant, be sure to list the eligible independent institution(s) of your choice when completing the FAFSA and be sure to accurately answer all residency questions.

Information about eligibility requirements and more, including Frequently Asked Questions, can be found at https://sctuitiongrants.org/.

Lottery Tuition Assistance Program
Topic: Dual enrollment grades

Guidance: A student will receive dual enrollments grades from both the high school and the higher education institution. The grading scale for dual enrollment coursework is established in an agreement between the high school and college through which the course is attempted. It is important that students contact the school counseling office at their high school, and the academic program office at their higher education institution to determine what changes, if any, have been made to the grading scale for 2019- 2020.

This link addresses the SCDE Uniform Grading Scale compliance and procedures in response to changes and information issued to dual credit students by some institutions of higher education.

https://ed.sc.gov/newsroom/school-district-memoranda-archive/covid-19-sc-uniform-grading-policy-guidance-for-students-enrolled-in-dual-credit-courses/covid-19-sc-uniform-grading-policy-guidance-for-students-enrolled-in-dual-credit-courses-memo/

General S.C. State Scholarship Questions:
I plan to enroll part-time this year – how will my plans impact my scholarship eligibility?

It will be important to check the eligibility requirements for state and institutional scholarships and grants as some may require students to attend full time. For example, the Palmetto Fellows, LIFE, SC HOPE and SC Tuition Grants require students to attend full time. Other state grants such as SC Need-based Grants or Lottery Tuition Assistance at our two-year institutions permit students to attend part-time and still receive funds. Also, there may be opportunities to work on campus through college work study. It is important to check with the admissions office <u>and</u> the financial aid office at your college or university, if planning to attend part time so that both offices can provide guidance.

Topic: Can I take college classes this summer after I graduate?

Guidance: The regulations for each of the scholarship programs (Palmetto Fellows, LIFE, SC HOPE) determine that each student is allotted a maximum of 8 terms of eligibility for an approved 4-year degree program and a maximum of 10 terms of eligibility for an approved 5-year degree program at an eligible institution. By regulations, these terms of eligibility do not begin until the student enrolls at an accredited institution during the first Fall or Spring term following high school graduation (for up to one year for Palmetto Fellows Scholarship recipients). Students <u>can</u> enroll and complete coursework during the Summer term immediately following high school graduation and maintain all allotted terms of eligibility. If Summer 2020 is the term immediately following high school graduation, you will be unable to receive scholarship funding for the coursework, not will use a term of your allotted eligibility.

Topic: Can I take a GAP Year after high school graduation?

Guidance: The regulations for the LIFE and SC HOPE Scholarships determine that the terms of eligibility do not begin until the student enrolls at an accredited institution during the first Fall or Spring term following high school graduation. Students <u>can</u> delay their entry into college indefinitely and can still maintain their eligibility as long as they 1) do not earn college credit during this time period; 2) the student's parents or guardians must maintain their S.C. residency during this time period; and 3) the student must be eligible upon enrollment. Should the criteria for the awards change the student's time period off, there is no guarantee that they would remain eligible.

The regulations for the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship determine that the terms of eligibility do not begin until the student enrolls at an accredited institution during the first Fall or Spring term following high school graduation. Students <u>can</u> delay their entry into college for up to one year, and can still maintain their eligibility as long as they 1) do not earn college credit during this time period; 2) the student's parents or guardians must maintain their S.C. residency during this time period; and 3) the student must be eligible upon enrollment. Should the criteria for the awards change the student's time period off, there is no guarantee that they would remain eligible.

My first-choice school may no longer be affordable – what other options do I have?

Seniors should first contact the financial aid office at their first-choice college and share their concerns about affordability. The office may provide options that were not available a few weeks ago. If the first-choice college remains unaffordable, seniors should look at other institutions especially in South Carolina. In state tuition at the public colleges and universities is typically lower than out of state colleges and universities. Independent colleges and universities also offer tuition discounts. All of the SC public and independent college and universities offer state and institutional scholarships and grants.

Will I be able to take my AP Exams this year?

The College Board is moving AP exams to an online format for 2020 to preserve the opportunity for students to benefit from the hard work they have put in this year. The SC colleges and universities will continue to award AP credits according to their policies. The College Board has been diligent to ensure the following: test accommodations, content rigor, technology support, test security, and commitment to providing students have the opportunity to earn college credit. Full information for students can be found here: https://apcoronavirusupdates.collegeboard.org/students

Financial Aid Planning

Seniors are still encouraged to complete financial aid applications, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid.

The FAFSA remains the foundation of financial assistance for most students and other state and federal financial aid. Also, Seniors should contact the financial aid office at the college or university they plan to attend. These offices can be a great resource for students and families. Contact the financial aid office for guidance about completion of the FAFSA and information about other aid, including departmental or institutional scholarships at the college or university.

Financial Aid Resources

NEW

New NCAN Guide for K-12 5 actions to take Right Now to Help Seniors Transition After Graduation https://www.ncan.org/news/502022/New-NCAN-Guide-for-K-12-5-Actions-to-Take-Right-Now-to-Help-Seniors-Transition-After-Graduating.htm

Guides from the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice: https://hope4college.com/supporting-students-during-covid19/

COVID Response for Students who are Homeless or With Experience in Foster Care https://hope4college.com/covid-19-response-for-students-who-are-homeless-or-with-experience-in-foster-care/

Surviving COVID-19 A #RealCollege Guide for Students
https://hope4college.com/surviving-covid-19-a-realcollege-guide-for-students/

Student Loan Borrower Resource Page
https://ticas.org/covid-resources-for-student-loan-borrowers

Filling Out the FAFSA 2020-21 – Dependent Students
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFijtBHLIeY&feature=youtu.be

Filling Out the FAFSA 2020-21- Independent Students
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sl9N7fYwyw&feature=youtu.be

Completing the FAFSA 2020-21
https://youtu.be/Y8nfk5ApcQ4

Checklists for College Students
https://cdn.ymaws.com/collegeaccess.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/blog/covid19/studentu_checklist.pdf

Help During COVID_19 Get Schooled
https://getschooled.com/journey/get-to-college/help-during-covid-19